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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 003406

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BG](#) [BGD](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER URGES USG TO ENSURE LEVEL
POLITICAL PLAYING FIELD

Classified By: CDA Judith Chammas, Reason(s): 1.4 (b),(d)

1. (C) Summary: Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina told CDA that the international community "has to ensure a fair election if you want to see us participate." Hasina complained of BNP coalition "terrorism" intimidating her supporters while noting the achievements of past Awami League governments. End summary.

2. (SBU) On July 13, Charge D'affaires Chammas called on opposition leader Sheikh Hasina with poloff (notetaker). Also in attendance were Awami League (AL) International Affairs Secretary Syed Abul Hossain and Presidium member Kazi Zafarullah.

3. (C) CDA stressed the importance of AL participation in the next elections noting, as a good sign, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil's recent roundtable discussions with the Health Minister. The CDA asked if the result of that meeting might be shared. Hasina sidestepped the question, doubting the BNP's sincerity and directing her remarks to the BNP's "terrorist" activities, noting that there are many areas where AL people cannot freely travel.

4. (C) Encouraged by the CDA to elaborate on the AL's election plans, Zafarullah said, "We want to participate because the AL thrives on elections" but "you should make a level playing field." Hasina said that "you have to ensure a fair election if you want to see us participate."

5. (C) Hasina noted that the AL has always come to power "not by the bullet but by the ballot." She cited at length AL achievements, including improving literacy, non-interference in the judiciary, increased development activities, and denationalizing industries. She noted "during our time" the AL ensured no one suffered during floods and famine, and that it was the AL which introduced the idea of the caretaker government.

6. (C) CDA inquired about the AL proposed electoral changes set to be announced July 15 (septel). Hasina begged off, saying she did not have the paper.

7. (C) Comment: We should resist AL efforts to put the onus on the USG for creating a level political playing field, stressing instead that the AL should exploit, not opt out of, the political process. That said, we are also stressing that our DG programs and our initiatives with EU and other like-minded embassies to strengthen the political process are geared to making elections more transparent and accountable.
CHAMMAS